



The Music & Vision

classical music newsletter

Seymour Bernstein — Issue 86, 1 May 2015

'In a scene early in the documentary *Seymour: An Introduction*, the pianist and film's protagonist discusses his concept of timing with a student. The pulse is perhaps the most important aspect of music. It's the heartbeat.

'Throughout this beautifully crafted film, Seymour Bernstein exhibited his own impeccable timing in the most natural way. Whether executing a poignant passage at the keyboard, telling a delightful story from his past, identifying just what a student needs at a lesson or sharing his insights on life, Bernstein does it all with a simple grace. He's comfortable with himself and what he does, and through the personal satisfaction and sense of security he has gained by way of his relationship to music, he is able to impart these sensations to those around him, even outside a strictly musical setting.

'Actor-Director Ethan Hawke was captivated by Bernstein as a person and an artist when they met at a dinner party several years ago. In particular, Hawke empathized with the pianist's idea of integrating what is learned in one's art form into life. The two men became friends, a famous movie star at the height of his career and an octogenarian pianist, composer and teacher. Perhaps on the surface, this would seem an unlikely duo, but the younger man saw something special in the older, perhaps wiser, mentor figure and he approached Bernstein with the idea of a documentary. Bernstein laughed. At the age of eighty-eight, he can now add movie star to his *résumé*.

Karen Haid reports from Las Vegas on Ethan Hawke's new film ...

CHALLENGING, VERSATILE AND UNEXPECTED

Roderic Dunnett visits Hungarian State Opera: 'Opera in Budapest is flying high. While the English or American enthusiast might scan the listings for an opera trip to Paris, Vienna or Munich, they would do really well to add another company to their "not to be missed" options: the Hungarian State Opera.'

OPERA
MAGYAR ÁLLAMI OPERAHÁZ
HUNGARIAN STATE OPERA

FAUST
225

15 May –
1 June
2015

Gounod *Faust* 17, 19, 21, 23, 26, 31 May
Stravinsky *The Rake's Progress* 16, 20 May
Busoni *Doktor Faust* 22, 24 May
Weber *Der Freischütz* 27, 29 May
Boito *Mefistofele* 28, 30 May
Budapest Philharmonic Orchestra Symphonic Evening – conductor ▶ Michael Schönwandt 1 June

2015

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Faust 225 Festival at The Hungarian State Opera, Budapest, 15 May-1 June 2015

'Production standards have soared in Budapest, and under the present General Director, Szilveszter Ókovács, they are positively thriving. His go-ahead management has succeeded in prising more money out of the government, a great asset to productions, sets and musical standards. Gradually, in the last few years, older productions, some of them predating 1989 and the fall of Communism (indeed a few dated back much farther), have been replaced in Budapest with less static, thrusting productions by vigorous directors and perceptive designers seeking to get rid of merely statuesque delivery and provide something challenging, versatile and unexpected.'

'Festivals are enlivening the repertoire, and now along comes *Faust225*. Just as 2014, the Opera House's one-hundred-and-thirtieth birthday, saw *Strauss150*, a resplendent overview of the German composer's anniversary (the year before, both Wagner and Verdi played significant roles), so the major event for Budapest in 2015 is *Faust225*, a powerfully conceived festival to celebrate the 225th anniversary of the first publication of Goethe's play *Faust*, one of the most significant pieces of dramatic writing since the plays of Shakespeare. The four-hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare's death will also feature in a big way in 2016.'

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If your event isn't listed, please **add it here**.

CD REVIEWS — EMINENTLY SUCCESSFUL



Paul Sarcich: '... a speculative but imaginative recreation of a world lost. One doesn't imagine that medieval monks in far-flung outposts sounded like a well-drilled Cambridge collegiate choir (and the Gonville and Caius choristers are immaculate in execution), but as an ear-opening exercise in what might have been, this disc is eminently successful.' (*In Praise of Saint Columba*: Delphian Records *DCD34137*)

Stephen Francis Vasta: 'If you don't know these quartets, and would rather not jump in with the entire Emerson cycle, you really couldn't improve on this issue as an introduction. I hope the Carduccis will see fit — gradually, of course — to work their way through the entire series.' (Shostakovich: String Quartets 4, 8 and 11. Signum Classics *SIGCD418*). Vasta also reviews Berlioz's *Harold in Italy* on LSO Live.

Ron Bierman: 'Lee Actor is a contemporary American composer who received early musical training, then detoured into a successful career in the video game industry. He returned to music as a conductor and composer in 2001, and has since written quite a few unabashedly Romantic works, including appealing violin and saxophone concertos. This is the first recording of the three pieces on this release ... Neoromantics should give this one a try.' (Lee Actor: Piano Concerto; Symphony No 3; Divertimento. Navona Records *NV5986*)

Geoff Pearce: '... a sonic discovery. The lush orchestration caught my attention first, and I also appreciated the full-blown romantic melodies. There was much more, however, and I felt that it opened the door to a musical expressionism, more fully recognized by Zemlinsky's brother in law, Arnold Schonberg, and particularly by Alban Berg.' (Zemlinsky: *The Mermaid*; Sinfonietta - Helsinki Philharmonic / Storgårds. Ondine ODE 1237-5) Pearce also listens to Hovhaness on Naxos, to Beth Anderson on MSR Classics, and to Sydney Hodkinson on Navona Records.



Gerald Fenech: 'Agostino Steffani (1654-1728) was a highly regarded court composer, and during his lifetime his name was famous throughout the continent. Indeed, his music influenced such great names as Handel, J S Bach and Telemann, but after his demise at the age of seventy-four, his compositions fell into total neglect. This live recording of one of Steffani's best operatic works will no doubt do a world of good towards his rehabilitation, and hopefully interest in his *oeuvre* will be reignited. *Niobe, Regina di Tebe* ("Niobe, Queen of Thebes"), composed in 1687, was Steffani's last opera for Munich and the first to be based on a Greek myth. For the story, Luigi Orlandi, the librettist, decided to delve mainly into Book Six of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and he came up with a libretto full of dramatic moments laid out against a background of spectacular sets and marvelous machines to depict the supernatural elements.' (Opus Arte OACD9008D) Fenech is also impressed by Grigory Sokolov's Salzburg recital (Deutsche Grammophon 479 4342).

Howard Smith: '... in two works central to the concerto repertoire, Cook shows she's a musician to be reckoned with. Her style is in no way 'bravura'. However her allegiance to composers' requirements is always clearly in evidence ... this is a highly commendable performance tackled with a rich tonal bloom and impressive technical address.' (Kim Cook - Saint-Saëns, Lalo and Fauré. MSR Classics MS 1512). Smith also recommends music by Maurice Jacobson on Naxos (8.571351) and listens to Fauré, Schumann and Bartók violin sonatas from the Jade Duo (MSR Classics, MS 1510), to Ivan Ilić playing Scriabin on Heresy Records (HERESY 015) and to Baroque premieres from Hideko Udagawa and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra on Nimbus (NI 6299).

Browse our latest CD reviews ...

If you enjoy listening to the sound samples in our CD reviews, you might already know that you can usually hear an extra sample on the 'CD information page' which is linked from the bottom of each review. An alternative way to reach these CD information pages is via our **New Releases** section, where you can also listen to samples from CDs which haven't yet been reviewed.

ENSEMBLE — FRESHNESS AND VITALITY

Mike Wheeler: 'Do any members of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra play in a folk band when they're not at their day job? The irresistible sense of swing (not necessarily in the jazz sense) they bring to the dance rhythms behind so much of what they play is surely one of their defining characteristics. The firm underpinning coming from the double basses ranged across the back of the platform provided a springboard for their colleagues to play off, and the resulting freshness and vitality in the overture and two dances from Smetana's *The Bartered Bride* was infectious (Royal Concert Hall, Nottingham, UK, 21 April 2015).

'Against a lively feel for orchestral detail, soloist Chloë Hanslip made a poised first entry in Mendelssohn's E minor Violin Concerto, serving notice that technique was going to be placed at the service of expression. Mendelssohn, you felt sure, would have approved.'



Chloë Hanslip. Photo © 2009 Benjamin Ealovega

Wheeler is also impressed by Haydn, Sibelius and Beethoven from the Dante Quartet, by Mendelssohn, Pärt, Mozart and Beethoven from Samuel Jacobs, Sinfonia Viva and Duncan Ward, enjoys Mozart, Chopin, Brahms and Musorgsky from pianist Ingrid Jacoby, and listens to a Bach *St Matthew Passion* in Derby.

Giuseppe Pennisi reports from Rome on productions of *Aida* and *Lucia di Lammermoor* (in memory of Luca Ronconi), where Teatro dell'Opera has increased box office takings by sixty percent over the last few months, and where the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia performed Salvatore Sciarrino's unusual *La nuova Euridice secondo Rilke*.



The triumph scene from Verdi's *Aida* at Teatro dell'Opera di Roma, with ballet *étoile* Alessandra Amato (bottom centre). Photo © 2015 Yasuko Kageyama

Pennisi also travels to Venice, for the opening weekend of the Onslow Festival, celebrating George Onslow (1784-1853), and to Bologna, where he is impressed by a production of Janáček's *Jenůfa* which is almost a premiere:

'Juraj Valčuha conducted the orchestra with great care; each instrumentalist appeared to be a soloist, sometimes with Moravian folk instruments. Angeles Blancas Gulin, who often plays young and attractive women (such as Cleopatra and Poppea), was made up to look old and became a formidable Sacristan. Andrea Dankova was the highly dramatic Jenůfa, and Brenden Gunnell was Laça with a clear timbre and a magnificent high C. Ales Briscein is the arrogant bullish Steva. A vast number of others, many of them young Italian singers, counterpoint the principals, all to great success.'

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OBITUARIES — MIRIAM BRICKMAN AND RONALD SENATOR



Miriam Brickman at the piano, with husband Ronald Senator at her side, in 2010

As this newsletter is sent out, we learn of the tragic deaths of British composer Ronald Senator and his American wife, pianist Miriam Brickman, in a fire yesterday (30 April 2015) at their house in Yonkers, New York, USA. *M&V's* Keith Bramich was introduced to them at a concert in London many years ago, and remembers them both for their friendliness, openness and knowledgeable conversation.

We also mark the passing of Rolf Smedvig, David L Kaplan, Claudio Prieto and Andrew Porter.

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ASK ALICE — ON AIR TRAVEL WITH A CELLO

Alice McVeigh: 'I remember the Hanover Band staging a sit-down strike in the USA, upon learning that the airline in question refused to allow the two French horns on to our flight (because — they couldn't 'fit under the seat in front'). Anyway, we were affronted — so affronted that we all refused to board, making the flight — economically speaking — unworkable.

It was effing amazing how fast room was found for those horns!!!

However, the moral remains. If you consist of even a decent-sized chamber group you can make your point and be listened to ... If you are a single cellist, however, you're in deep trouble.



Alice McVeigh. Cartoon © 2015 Pat Achilles

Read more ...

Also, this month, Alice investigates luthiers, violins and space-age materials, considers the health issues when choosing an instrument, and writes about the musicality of cats and dogs.

More episodes of 'Ask Alice' ...

Ask Alice your classical music-related questions ...

This newsletter, edited by Keith Bramich, is a monthly taster for Basil Ramsey's high quality and colourful online classical music magazine, published every day since January 1999.

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